

Ferreri, G.

The American Institution
for the
Education of the Deaf.



**M.C. MIGEL LIBRARY
AMERICAN PRINTING
HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**

The Association Review,
v. 9, No. 4, 1907. Oct.

C. 1

HV 1663

F
copy 1

THE AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE DEAF.¹

G. FERRERI, ROME, ITALY.

CHAPTER XIII.

EDUCATION OF THE BLIND-DEAF.

Long before undertaking the comparative study and research of American schools, I had certain experience in the things of which I have spoken. Now, however, I must treat a subject in regard to which I have had only speculative ideas, as I was obliged to confess the first time I wrote on the results of the education of the Blind-Deaf.

The phenomenon of the complication of deafness with blindness is fortunately rare in Italy.² So much so that even Pendola, who had been in the midst of the Deaf for more than half a century, had no experience with it. Indeed, for a long time he did not even know that the instruction of a blind-deaf individual was possible. (See the *Statistics of the Deaf in the Grand-Duchy of Tuscany*, 1844.)

As regards myself, I think I can affirm that, in some cases of deafness complicated with blindness, they have never gone farther in Italy than an elementary religious instruction.

In saying religious instruction, it would seem at first to say a great deal. Because I think that for those persons who had never had any idea of religion, communicated first of all from the lips of a mother, and fortified later by the example of exterior worship, religious instruction is one of the most difficult. But notwithstanding this, the object of the first educators of the Deaf was exclusively that of giving their pupils a knowledge of the Christian doctrine, and to incline their hearts to a moral and

¹Translated from the Italian for THE ASSOCIATION REVIEW by the author. Begun in the June, 1904, number.

²The last Italian census gave the numbers 196 Blind-Deaf, 38,204 Blind, and 31,211 Deaf. But the census is made in Italy in such a manner as not to be of any value for particulars of this kind. In fact, they do not distinguish either the kind nor the nature of the pathological case in question.

"The first man in this country to advocate the oral method of instruction for the deaf." The inscription reads:

In memory of

FRANCIS GREEN,

Earliest American Advocate in Behalf of the Education
of the Deaf,

Born in Boston, 21 August, 1742;

Died in Medford, 21 April, 1809.

A Graduate of Boston Latin School, 1756, and of Harvard College, 1760; an Officer in the British Army, Where he Served with Distinction; and the Author of "*Vox Oculis Subjecta*" (London, 1783), an early work on the instruction of the Deaf, and a writer for the Newspapers on that subject.

This tablet is a fitting testimonial to a native of Boston, who not only advocated instruction in articulation and speech-reading, in this country and in England, but "was active in promoting the establishment of a free school for the deaf" in England, and unsuccessfully endeavored to have such an institution established in America. During more than twenty-five years he put forth earnest and continued efforts in behalf of the deaf, and contributed many articles on the subject of the education and alleviation of the deaf, to the *New England Palladium*, the *Boston Courier*, and other periodicals. He also compiled statistics concerning the name, age, sex and residence of the deaf in Massachusetts. His interest in behalf of the deaf was aroused through finding that his own son Charles Green, born deaf or who lost his hearing before six months of age, could be taught to converse freely. This son was sent from Boston to Edinburgh, Scotland, where he entered Braidwood's Academy, in February, 1780, and in time was able to carry on a conversation orally. Dr. Bell believes that "there can be no doubt that the 'Messrs. Braidwood' (Thomas Senior, and his son John) were among the best teachers of the deaf that the world has yet produced."

(To be continued.)

religious sentiment. An irrefutable proof of this lies in our special literature, made up two-thirds of religious catechism.

The teaching of language was never an end in itself, but only served as a means for the explanation of the mysteries of religion. They also made use of drawing as an aid in this instruction. I do not believe, however, that for the Deaf any form of worship can have a real spiritual value unless it is possible to give them an explanation founded, above all, on their knowledge spoken and written. It is true, however, that many competent educators, as Assarotti, Boselli, Pendola, Ghislandi, to quote only our own, believed that they could succeed better and quicker by means of the Mimic. This does not prevent us, however, from having another opinion, and we find ourselves in good company, for we can call to mind Tarra, Brambilla, Marchio, and Pelliccioni, without leaving the reign of the Blest. The educators first mentioned had too high an idea of the Mimic, and as they were also very intelligent, the Mimic had really a value of psychic content. If any thing, they were subject to an illusion. They believed, in good faith, that they could instil into the minds of the Deaf that same psychic content in all its extension of intellectuality and spirituality which it had for themselves. It happened, certainly, in respect to the Mimic, just as it did in the field of general didactics, that memory, too often, took the place of intelligence (and this custom is not yet done away with!), and all that it was possible to commit to memory was considered an intellectual acquisition. They interpreted to the letter that famous saying of Cicero's, recognizing as knowledge what one can commit to memory. When, however, just comparisons are made, it is too often seen that the Mimic was and remains a material and materialized language, such, in short, that it does not guarantee, especially in spiritual matters, a sure perceptive comprehension. Every teacher can, in fact, verify the ability of the Deaf to reproduce by imitation gestures and mimic of matchless ascetic meaning, without having the shadow of an idea or of psychic elaboration. What can be obtained with the Blind-Deaf in religious instruction I do not know, nor do I wish to pass judgment upon it from merely speculative premises, which certainly would not be very favorable, if we think of an instruction based chiefly on the sense of touch. But, as usual, this may be a prejudice on my part, not having had any experience with the Blind-Deaf before coming to America. It was only there that I had the

opportunity of recognizing the fact that it had been a real pre-conception to think that only with touch one could give a higher instruction to the intelligent Blind-Deaf. In fact, I was able to ascertain that the results obtained, which certainly were wonderful, are due above all to the teaching of language by means of writing and the manual alphabet. So that it made an impression on me to hear it said that Dr. Howe undertook the education of Laura Bridgman without knowing the manual alphabet. From what I have since read, however, on the subject, I can now affirm that to Dr. Howe is due only the idea of the education of the Blind-Deaf, and that the practice of it, at least for the results obtained from Laura Bridgman, is due to the ability of the teachers who devoted themselves to this intelligent work of mercy.

Neither in America did they think of the possibility of this instruction before 1837, which was the date of Laura Bridgman's entrance to the Institute for the Blind at Boston. The process of this first case of the education of the Blind-Deaf, one learns from a most interesting publication¹ which I read in America, and which will shortly be followed by a more complete study prepared by the daughters of Dr. Howe.

Now, however, it can be said that the education of the Blind-Deaf has gone beyond the period of experiment and of exceptions and has become a general fact.

In the Institution for the Deaf at New York, I met, soon after my arrival in the United States, some speaking Blind-Deaf in whom instruction had already given good results. One girl, especially, seemed to me so well educated that I could not believe it possible to carry instruction farther. From the conversations I was able to have by means of Dr. Currier's fingers, I gathered that, when there is intelligence, one can teach written and spoken language in spite of whatever deficiency there may be in the development of the senses. To the questions I asked the girl, she replied either by spoken words or by means of a typewriter, in the use of which she had acquired a marvelous rapidity and precision. But the revelation for me did not consist in this, but rather in ascertaining that the girl knew already the English language to perfection, and, therefore, was in condition to understand any information which was transmitted to her by the manual alphabet. I was persuaded then that the instruction of the Blind-

¹ "Life and Education of Laura Bridgman." Boston, 1879. Observations and daily notes by Mrs. Lamson, who was one of Laura's teachers.

Deaf is not a miracle, nor is it an American exaggeration, but a fact resulting from the intellectual condition of the pupil and from the power of the organism of language as an instrument for the elaboration of ideas.

It can now be maintained that the luminous idea of Dr. Howe could not have been effectuated with the success it had, if one of Laura's teachers had not taken from the Didactics of the Deaf the manual alphabet, which is, after all, the means most adapted for the communications of the teacher with the Deaf affected by blindness. It is easy to explain, then, that, given a sure means of teaching and the psychic capacity of learning language, the development of the Instruction of the Blind-Deaf reënters the circle of natural phenomena.

In a recent article translated from Norwegian into German¹ by our colleague Stelling of Emden, we read that the first attempt to teach articulate speech to the Blind-Deaf is that of the Principal Hofgaard, of Hamar (Norway). It seems to me that it would be only just to remember that Dr. Howe had also wished that a teacher should teach Laura Bridgman to speak. He did not have the good fortune, however, to find one who united with the art of teaching the blind the ability of teaching speech to the Deaf. Hence, the vocabulary of Laura Bridgman did not go farther than six or seven words and a few monosyllables which had for her and those near her the value of words. But anyway, it is not a question of who was the first that should interest us, but rather that of the possibility of such instruction. Now, it seems to me that in the United States they do not give the attention and consideration to this point which they ought to. And this defect must be attributed, according to my opinion, to the fact that there are no special Institutes in America for the education of the Blind-Deaf. It happens, in consequence, that they are admitted to the Institutes of the Blind, or, as an exception, to those of the Deaf. They think this is the best way to do, as is shown in a recent discussion on this subject by the educators of America. Nor do I wish to oppose myself to those who can boast a certain experience; therefore, I will limit myself to the statement of the things observed.

I have seen that the greater part of the cases of deafness and blindness are not congenital, or at least that the complication of

¹ "Organ der Taubstummen-Anstalten in Deutschland." 1903, 3 Heft. S. 74.

disasters is not congenital. In the Institute for the Blind in Boston, to give an example which illustrates my observation, I saw four girls who had become deaf or blind, or one and the other at the same time, after the second year of their age. Another was not at all mute, but only blind and deaf. In all of them, however, I saw a decided tendency to speak. Now, it seems to me that in such conditions one cannot and should not make a question of systems, so or so combined, but that one should give every care to the development and to the possible perfection of that tendency, which is, after all, most natural and offers a precious element of restoration in the midst of so much ruin. The Blind-Deaf who can speak has so many advantages over the blind deaf-mute that it ought to conquer every doubt and turn the attention of the educator, I would almost say from preference, to the cultivation of articulated speech. When the Blind-Deaf speaks and replies aloud to his interlocutor, he not only shortens by more than half, the path of instruction, but he feels himself nearer to humanity, because he is persuaded that he can overcome the obstacles which separate him from intercourse with his fellow-creatures and from spiritual communion of the family and the society of normal persons.

But let us limit ourselves to more elementary considerations and to what Physiology teaches us.

Every child, at the epoch of the physiological development of its organ of hearing and speech, tries to speak. This rule is confirmed by the exception made by idiots, in whom is lacking the will to do the action, because in them is lacking the central co-ordination and the mutual recall of the symbols of language. The intelligent Blind-Deaf cannot be helped like the Deaf by making use of the means of natural mimic, and so force themselves like normal persons to put into action the organs of speech. Of all this I had confirmation in the observations which I made in the school for the Blind at Boston, and in the study of the process followed in the education of Laura Bridgman, as well as in the conversations of several months which I was able to have without any interpreter with Helen Keller.

Of Laura Bridgman we read, and she who wrote it is still living, that "the impulse to pronounce a sound as the distinct name of a known person, seemed to be the first to be put into action; the translation of it into the language of signs came afterwards."

We can say that this not only seemed, but was an unquestionable fact. The impulse to speak is, in fact, common to all deaf-mutes whose deaf-mutism is not caused by central injuries, and one may say that the aptitude for speaking stands in direct relation to the degree of ability in conscious and intelligent mimic. This observation is analogous and parallel to that made by specialist physicians for the treatment of speech in defective children. In them, troubles in speech and incapacity for spontaneous or imitative speech are accompanied by a rigidity more or less serious of the limbs. We may also admit that the great skill and mobility which the hands of the Blind-Deaf acquire in the exercise of the manual alphabet correspond to the impulse they have to articulated speech. I have noticed, for example, in Helen Keller that the movement of her hands (manual alphabet) nearly always accompanies her speech, when she is thinking and elaborating in her mind what she intends afterwards to write.

Were it not that the system in vogue in the United States for education of the Blind-Deaf is decidedly opposed to studies which demand a scientific aim and a comparative analysis, it would be well, I think, to institute special researches, not only in the functional reciprocity and individual peculiarity of the different neuro-psychic factors of language, but also of the negative relation of the sensorial powers and the complex act of perception.

Mr. Wade, who is a sincere and devoted friend of these unfortunate ones, and who has made it his special mission to help materially and morally all the Blind-Deaf who come to his notice, holds the opinion that for teaching the Blind-Deaf no technical preparation is necessary. What he wrote in a recent publication, he has repeated in Convention (1901), to banish the idea of a special Institute for the Blind-Deaf of the United States. "It is sufficient," he said, "to put an intelligent, kind teacher in daily communication with a blind and deaf child, and he will acquire by himself so much experience as to surpass what the accumulated wisdom of centuries could suggest."

I am not precisely of this opinion, and believe that a special preparation would advantage a thousand times the task of the teacher, however kind of heart or intelligent.

Mr. Wade quotes, in support of his theory, some practical examples, and he has the good fortune to be able to indicate to the admiration of the world, in the excellent teachers who have dedi-

cated themselves to this mission, many personalities of intelligence and loving-kindness who, without any preparation, put into practice in the best possible manner the brilliant idea of Dr. Howe. Nor have I any reasons to oppose to these facts. But, in referring to what I have read on the subject, and to what I have learned from conversations with clever teachers of the Blind-Deaf, I could maintain, in my turn, that these capable teachers were not spared loss of time and fatigue of vain experiments, of young inexperience, and of dangerous deviations. And, if some one of them had been able to proceed directly to the goal, this was owing above all to the study of the process applied in the education of Laura Bridgman—processes constituted by the observations and studies of many and various teachers; and this, for me, signifies a special preparation. So that it is true that Miss Sullivan, the friend, teacher, and interpreter of Miss Keller, could today expound with unquestionable competence the defects, and the corrections of them she was obliged to make in those same processes, which were her guide in the arduous task which she has now triumphantly brought to an end.

From all this I am induced to maintain that a systematic arrangement of the studies and observations which the capable American teachers have made until now, could and should establish the basis of a real and true method for the development of the intellectual powers of the Blind-Deaf.

To this method in which written language is considered almost exclusively as the instrument for developing the higher powers, ought to be added, for the reasons given, a system for teaching articulated speech.

The happy experiences made in this respect by Hofgaard should be sufficient to spread this belief, and the educators of America should be convinced that "to limit the means of expression for the deaf-mutes and for the Blind-Deaf to the sole manual alphabet, means limiting their sphere in life." This is the opinion of Helen Keller, whom I believe to be more competent in the subject than any of us who write and talk of Pedagogy more or less scientific.

(To be continued.)

**Photomount
Pamphlet
Binder**

Gaylord Bros. Inc.

Makers

Syracuse, N. Y.

PAT. JAN 21, 1908

